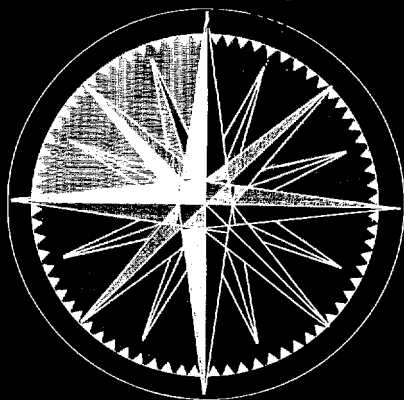


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SPECIAL REPORT

THE 23RD SOVIET PARTY CONGRESS

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE



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THE 23RD SOVIET PARTY CONGRESS

The Soviet Communist Party's 23rd Congress--the first since the Brezhnev-Kosygin regime took over from Khrushchev in October 1964--will open on 29 March. The Congress will hear a report on foreign and domestic policy and the state of the party by Brezhnev and will approve the draft five-year plan to be reported on by Kosygin. It will also "elect" a new central committee, the composition of which has already been decided by the top party leaders.

Party congresses have sometimes been mere rituals, but this is not always so. The 21st Congress in 1959 was fairly routine, but the 20th Congress in 1956 heard Khrushchev denounce Stalin and the 22nd Congress in 1961 saw an intensification of the Sino-Soviet dispute and carried the de-Stalinization campaign to its furthest limits. At least two issues which are likely to come up in some form at the 23rd Congress have explosive potential: Sino-Soviet relations and the present regime's assessment of Stalin and the Stalin period. If the Soviet leaders fail to treat these issues with great care, they run the risk of provoking more controversy at home and in the international Communist movement than they bargain for.

Functions of the Congress

According to the party texts, the congress is the "indisputable authority of party power," the formal apex of the party's hierarchical organization. It is composed of delegates ostensibly elected in a democratic manner at regional convocations by delegates who in turn have been elected by district meetings. In practice, however, the delegates are carefully selected in advance by the Moscow leadership.

In the early years of Soviet power, congresses participated actively in policy making,

debating and ratifying policies, and arbitrating disagreements over policy. Stalin, however, convened only four congresses between 1927 and 1952, and under him the congress degenerated into a rubber-stamp which was used to give the autocracy a semblance of democratic legitimacy and to propagate the regime's policies. Congresses have been convened with greater frequency and regularity in recent years, but the role of the congress and its operations have not essentially changed.

The convocation of a party congress is, nevertheless, an event of great importance in

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Soviet political life. It is the occasion for reviewing party activities and for authoritatively defining basic policies. It is also a primary reference point in party annals and historiography. Pronouncements of the 20th, 21st, and 22nd congresses are, for example, still used as basic policy guidelines even though these congresses were dominated by Khrushchev. The new Soviet leaders have consistently reaffirmed the principles enunciated at these congresses although they have repudiated most of the schemes Khrushchev put forward at intervening central committee plenums.

The convening of a congress also helps to bring into view the crosscurrents of political and policy disagreements within the leadership. Furthermore, it opens a period for reviewing and renewing the membership of the ruling bodies--the presidium, the secretariat, and the central committee--and thus is a time for individual leaders to seek to place their followers in positions of influence.

The decline in the role of the congress in the Stalin period was accompanied by a steady expansion of its size. In 1918, shortly after the party came to power, an elite corps of only 104 delegates was elected to the congress. About 1,400 delegates attended the 20th and 21st congresses and at the 22nd in 1961 the number jumped to nearly 5,000. The new regime apparently shares Khrushchev's view of the congress as a mass meet-

ing, as about 5,000 delegates have been chosen for the forthcoming congress.

The lists of delegates indicate that a large number--approximately three fourths of the total--will be attending a party congress for the first time. The remaining one fourth were also delegates to the 22nd Congress. Thus the ratio of veteran to new delegates is about the same as it was at the last congress. The sharp influx of new delegates in 1961 followed an extensive purge in 1960-61 of "incompetent" and "corrupt" officials. An extensive reshuffling of party functionaries and government bureaucrats has been carried out since Khrushchev's ouster, but the shifts more often have been changes in assignments than purges. The significance of the present large turnover in delegates--especially for political relationships in the top leadership--is thus unclear. The first clues may be provided by the lists of delegates on the standing committees of the congress. "Election" of these committees will be the first item of business.

Business of the Congress

The general state of the nation, as seen by the top leadership, will be taken up as soon as standing committee elections are disposed of. As first secretary of the central committee, Brezhnev will deliver the "accountability report," which, in theory, is an accounting to the party's highest body of actions

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taken by the central committee since the preceding congress. This keynote address reviews developments in the interval, defines the current situation, and outlines a program for the future. It is usually divided into three major sections: the international situation, domestic affairs, and the state of the party. To maintain a facade of democracy, presentation of the report is followed by discussions.

If there are any "dramatic moments" at the congress they are most likely to occur in Brezhnev's speech itself or during subsequent discussion of it. Kosygin's report on the Five-Year plan, the only other report of significance scheduled, seems likely to be a drab presentation of the "Draft Directives of the 23rd Party Congress for the Five-Year Plan" published in the Soviet press in February. Kosygin may elaborate on economic measures set forth in the draft, but the basic outline is almost certain to remain unchanged.

Foreign Affairs

Brezhnev can be expected to review Soviet foreign policy since the preceding congress in a rather straightforward manner consistent with the character assumed by the post-Khrushchev regime. He is likely to focus on the success the USSR has achieved during his stewardship in improving the position of the Soviet party in the Communist world and strengthening the role of the USSR in the international community.

The indications are that in discussing Sino-Soviet relations Brezhnev will offer a low-key and nonpolemical recapitulation of Soviet efforts to heal the split in the international Communist movement and to achieve unity with the Chinese in dealing with the problems confronting the Communist bloc. It is likely that Brezhnev will attempt to demonstrate by a measured citation of the record that the Chinese have turned a deaf ear to appeals for unity and have indeed called for an organizational split in the movement. Brezhnev will be able to point to China's empty chair at the congress as proof of Peking's intransigence. Privately, the Soviet leaders are probably gratified by the Chinese boycott which they will see as vindicating Soviet tactics in the dispute with Peking. It seems unlikely that the Soviet leaders would choose to jeopardize the gains they have scored against the Chinese in recent months by pressing at the congress for some sort of "demarkation" in the Sino-Soviet conflict.

In reviewing international developments, Brezhnev is almost certain to focus on the war in Vietnam and to reaffirm Soviet commitments to Hanoi. In discussing US-Soviet relations, he will undoubtedly say again, in effect, that improvement in these relations takes second place to the requirements of supporting North Vietnam and Moscow's struggle with Peking.

Over-all, Brezhnev's aim will be to serve up to the

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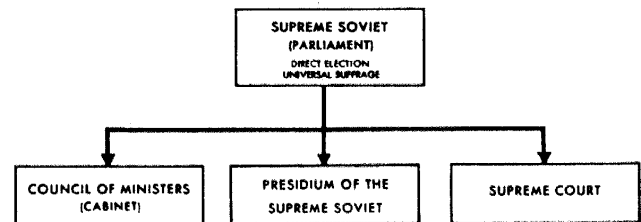
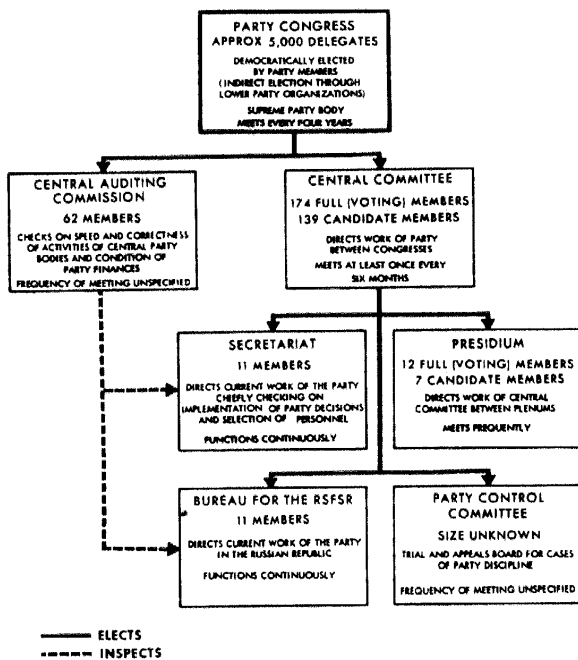
STRUCTURE OF TOP SOVIET GOVERNING BODIES
(on Eve of 23rd Party Congress)

Theory

PARTY

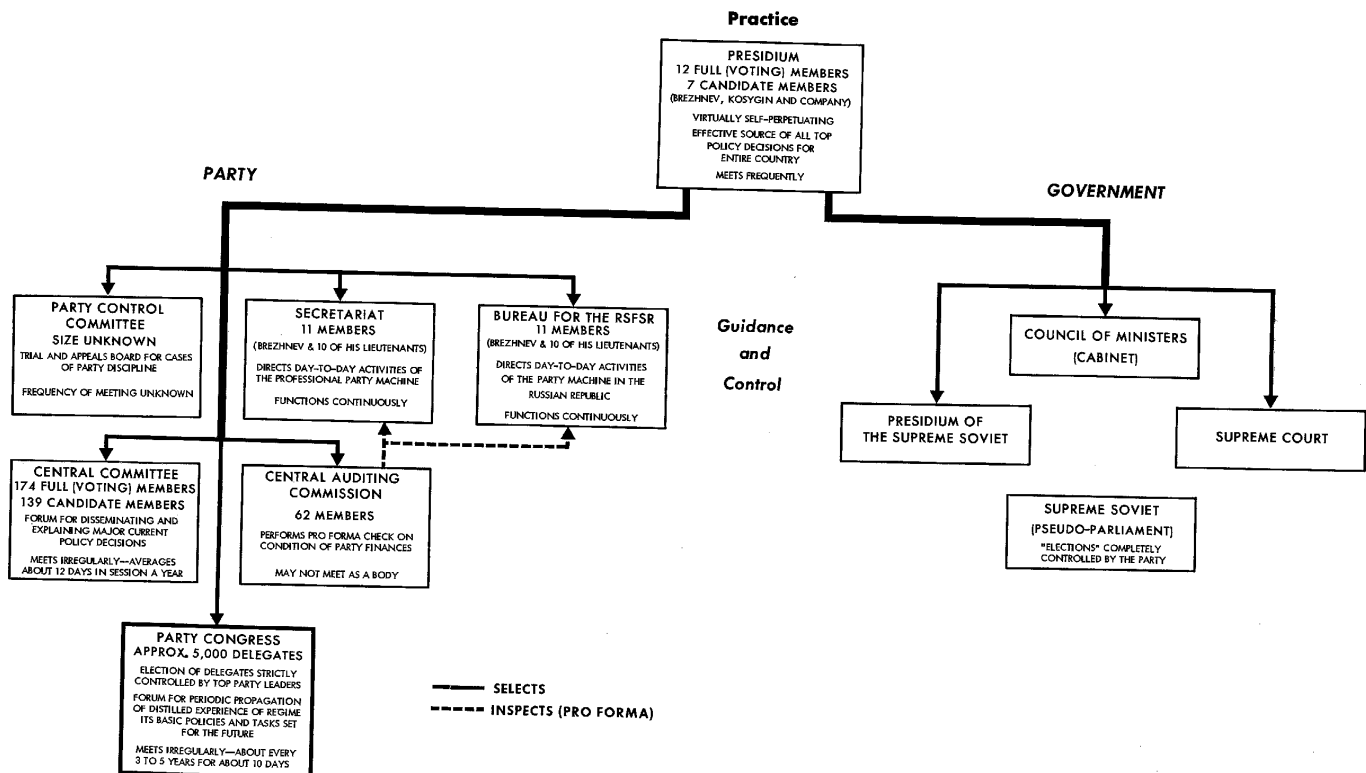
GOVERNMENT

Influence
and
Guidance



STRUCTURE OF TOP SOVIET GOVERNING BODIES

(on Eve of 23rd Party Congress)



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congress a convincing record of the USSR's efforts since Khrushchev's ouster to reinforce its credentials as the leading Communist power and a major contestant in the international arena. He will probably note that since his assumption of power the CPSU has considerably improved its relations with Asian Communists. He can also be expected to point to Moscow's more tactful approach to the Eastern European countries.

Regarding relations with the nonaligned world, Brezhnev can probably be counted on to cite Moscow's mediation at Tashkent as a hallmark of the Soviet Union's "policy of peace," and to claim a general improvement of relations with the nations on the Soviet periphery.

Khrushchev and Stalin

Brezhnev will probably use the final portion of his report to set the official party line on the ouster of Khrushchev. It is an open question just how far criticism of Khrushchev will go, but, at a minimum, the official formulation on his errors must justify the already considerable criticism of him. Further "errors" may however be surfaced.

Among the more likely items to be added to the catalog of Khrushchev's faults is his portrayal of Stalin--particularly at the 22nd Party Congress--as all evil, without a single redeeming virtue.

Any readjustment of the official position on Stalin will probably be couched in deliberately vague and unsensational terms and will be put forward in the guise of greater "historical objectivity."

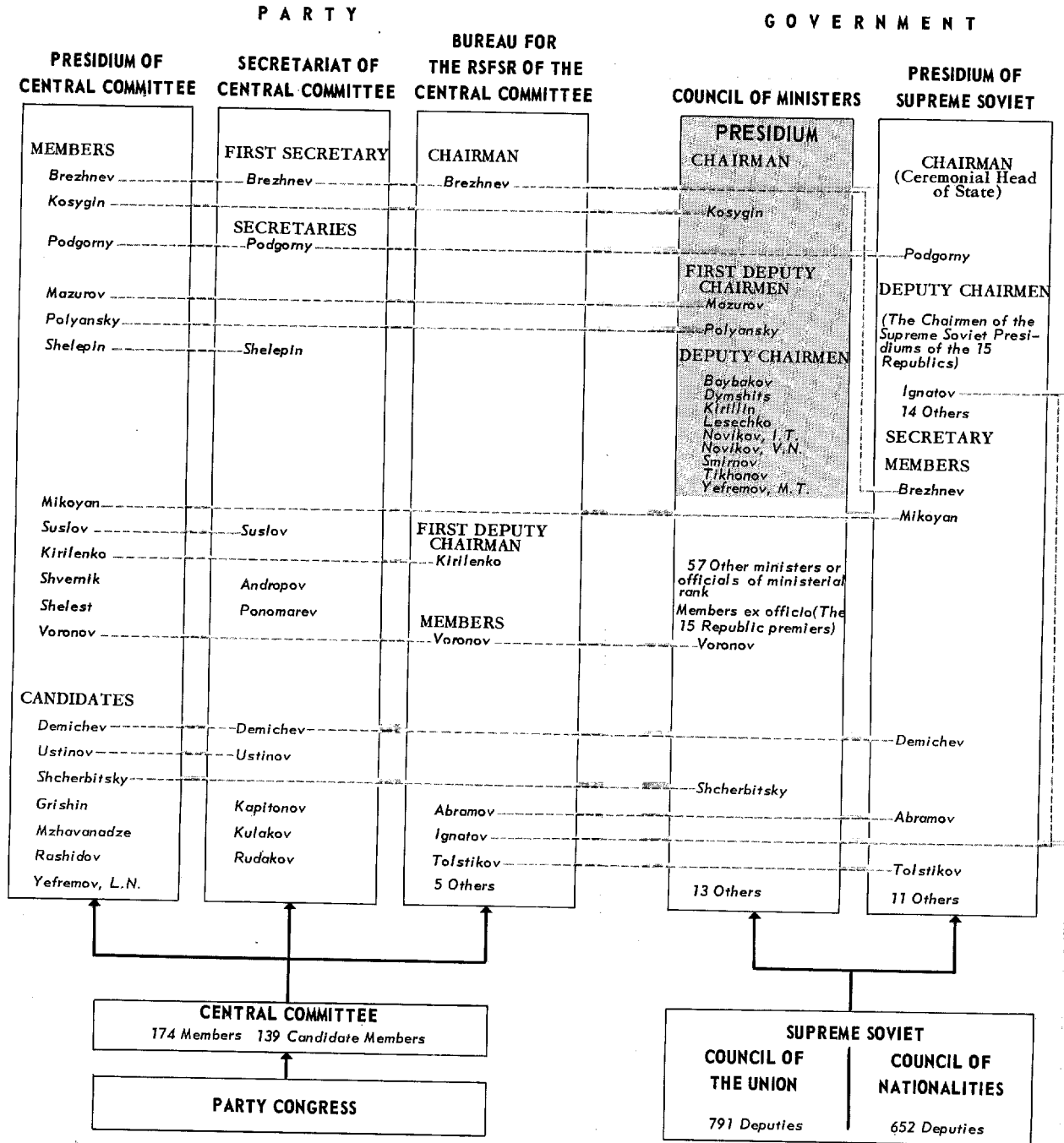
Regardless of the care with which the new formulation is prepared and handled, however, any improvement in Stalin's official image will strengthen the hand of conservative elements in the Soviet Union and create apprehension among liberals. If an attempt is made to go beyond a brief general statement and to reinstate specific Stalinist policies or gloss over his reign of terror, current disagreements between conservative and reformist forces might turn into a sharp factional struggle. Any such step could be expected also to send shivers through the non-Soviet delegations.

Many of Khrushchev's policies in party organizations and management have been "corrected." Others, however, such as membership policies, though

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SECRET**INTERLOCKING DIRECTORATE—USSR PARTY AND GOVERNMENT**

on the eve of the 23rd party congress



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Indicates Full Member, Presidium, Soviet Communist Party
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clearly the target of many high party officials, have continued in force. Apparently the Soviet leaders have had difficulty in reaching a consensus on further change, but it is hard to see how Brezhnev can avoid the question of the "correct" makeup and functioning of the party in his report.

Mass or Elite Party Concepts

The central issue is whether the party should be a mass organization in line with Khrushchev's approach (in the nine years following the 20th Congress the party grew by over 60 percent to 11.8 million members) or a relatively small elite corps as Stalin preferred it to be. Related to this issue are recruitment and promotion standards and party regulations governing turnover of membership in leading party bodies. Candidate presidium member and Georgian Republic party chief Mzhavanadze last June criticized Khrushchev's dilution of the party and went further toward refurbishing Stalin's image than any other responsible individual in the new regime by quoting Stalin as an authority for the view that the party should be a small governing elite. Mzhavanadze stated that "in his time, proceeding from the Leninist principle of building our party, Stalin said accurately and graphically: 'Our party is a fortress, the doors of which open only for the tested.'" Favorable allusion to the elite concept has been made in a number of recent newspaper and

journal articles, but there has been no reflection of it, either pro or con, in the statements of any other top leader.

Currently, however, other signs point to retention of the "mass" concept for the party organization. For example, the party has continued to grow in size--even in Georgia--and the leading organs "elected" at the recent republic party congresses have been expanded and the "renewal" requirements which Khrushchev sponsored have been observed. Moreover, as previously noted, the number of delegates to the 23rd Congress will be greater than at the last Khrushchev congress in 1961. Even while retaining the "mass" concept, however, the present leadership can opt for some tightening up in admissions policy and for the strengthening of discipline.

Election of Party Organs

The last item of business at the congress will be to elect a new central committee formally empowered to act for the congress when the latter is not in session. The congress also elects an auditing commission, which checks on party finances. As in the selection of delegates to the congress itself, election of these bodies simply means formal approval of a slate already prepared by the top leaders.

The central committee and the auditing commission are the major prestige bodies in the

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Soviet system, following of course, the presidium and secretariat which are respectively the policy and executive arms of the central committee. The central committee and auditing commission are, in fact, a roster of the political elite. Nearly all the more important and influential officials at the time of the congress--government executives, military leaders, and provincial party bosses,, as well as the national party leaders--are included. Membership on these bodies reflects the relationships established in behind-the-scenes political manipulation prior to a congress. With the passage of time, however, the membership becomes "out of date" as members die or lose their high political standing and new political relationships are established.

Between 35 and 40 percent of the 395 members of the central committee and central auditing commission elected at the 22nd Congress in 1961 are likely to be replaced at this congress. This is considerably lower than the 50 percent replacement in 1961, despite the political upheaval of Khrushchev's ouster. The reasons for this probable lower turnover are unclear. During the past year, there has been slowness in filling some key positions, suggesting the existence of conflicting points of view and the need for compromise. Also, the transfer of allegiance from Khrushchev to the new leaders may have been complete and unequivocal enough to give the new regime confidence to proceed deliberately in making personnel changes.

PERCENTAGE TURNOVER IN CENTRAL PARTY ORGANS
(CENTRAL COMMITTEE AND AUDITING COMMISSIONS)
AT REGULAR CONGRESSES IN SELECTED YEARS

	1956	1961	1963-64	1966
Armenia	21	44	44	33
Azerbaijan	37	46	57	35
Belorussia	14	33	--	52
Estonia	29	36	52	44
Georgia	25	41	57	51
Kazakhstan	42	49	--	62
Kirgizia	32	49	56	49
Latvia	28	39	53	43
Lithuania	35	34	56	32
Moldavia	28	42	55	41
Tadzhikistan	23	35	49	34
Turkmenistan	23	39	49	34
Ukraine	28	41	--	NA
Uzbekistan	19	40	--	54
USSR	36	50	--	*

-- No congress held

* 35-40 percent anticipated

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The slowness with which post-Khrushchev shifts have been made in the upper echelons has been matched lower down in the makeup of the new republic central committees and auditing commissions, elected at republic congresses during the past several weeks. In those ten republics where the last previous congresses were held in December 1963 or January 1964 when Khrushchev seemed firmly in control, the turnover in the recent elections was significantly less than at the preceding congresses. One can assume that in the four republics which had last held congresses in 1961, the bulk of the changes reflected in the present larger turnover occurred while Khrushchev was still in power.

The Top Leadership

Although not the business of the congress proper, the "election" by the new central committee of the ruling presidium and secretariat is a logical

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extension of the congress. The party rules adopted in 1961 require that one fourth of the presidium be replaced at each regular party congress--normally every four years--and "as a rule" the members are to be limited to three consecutive terms. However, this latter provision, which could affect only Brezhnev, Mikoyan, Shvernik, and Suslov at the present time, need not apply in the case of officials of "recognized authority, and high political organizational, and other qualities." This undoubtedly exempts Brezhnev but the status of the others is less certain. Shvernik, who is a relatively minor figure in the presidium and has been in poor health, is the most likely to be dropped. Mikoyan, who was retired as titular chief of state last December and whose power has waned since Khrushchev's ouster, may also retire completely from public life.

Others on the 19-man presidium who might be dropped to satisfy the turnover requirement,

if it is applied, are Leonid Yefremov, a provincial party boss, and Gennady Voronov, the Russian Republic (RSFSR) premier. Yefremov suffered a political setback shortly after Khrushchev's ouster, and Voronov does not appear to be as politically important as he once was.

A list of possible new members is hard to compile. Ivan Kapitonov, the secretary directly in charge of party organization and cadres, and Leningrad party boss Vasily Tolstikov are, however, possible choices.

The secretariat is exempted from the requirement for periodic renewal. The only change foreseeable is the dropping of Podgorny. He gave up his secretarial duties last December when he replaced Mikoyan as titular chief of state, but he has not been formally released from the secretariat. Some move might also be made to clarify the somewhat ambiguous party status of Aleksandr Shelepin.

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